
Reimagining
the Civic Commons

Measure What Matters

Tools to evaluate the social impacts of your city's public places

Version 2

Measure What Matters

Can parks, libraries, community centers, and trails connect people of all backgrounds, cultivate trust and create more resilient communities?

We believe they can.

To prove it we must measure what matters. This toolkit will help you get started.

Measure What Matters

Reimagining the Civic Commons is working to understand the multi-faceted value of our shared civic assets in order to make the larger case for further investment and attention.

To do that, we've designed a new system of measurement for public places and nearby neighborhoods. With this system, we are discovering how people are interacting with each other in place, and how the place can support a more engaged, equitable, sustainable, and economically vibrant community.

Whether you're managing a civic asset, planning new assets, heading up a friends' group, or advocating for better public places, these open-source tools will provide insight that you can use to reimagine your city's public places with social, environmental, and economic impact in mind.

With this meaningful data and analysis in hand, you can:

- Tell the story of your civic commons to community members, elected officials, and funders
- Understand what's working and what isn't so you can make smarter decisions
- Make a strong case for additional investment based upon impact

We invite you to explore the tools and put them to use in service to your city. If you have questions on how to use the tools, we're here to help. Contact Bridget Marquis at bmarquis@u3advisors.com.

Behind the Data

Learn more about our measurement methodology and how we're putting it to work.

[Measuring the Civic Commons: A Framework](#)

[Medium article: Measuring What Matters in the Commons](#)

[Medium article: Measurement Tools: Early Lessons from Detroit](#)

[Medium article: We're measuring the impact of investments in public places. Here's what we've learned.](#)

[Interim reports for Akron, Chicago, Detroit, and Memphis](#)

The Tools

Each tool includes instructions to help you get started and a way to collect and analyze data. You can customize the tools to meet your specific needs or use them as presented.

Neighborhood Survey Tool

With this tool, you can conduct a comprehensive survey of residents living within a specific neighborhood, focusing on neighborhoods near civic commons investments. By surveying residents at the neighborhood scale, you will be able to understand the social impact of your investments on all members of the surrounding community, including opinions about the investments, levels of engagement, travel patterns, sense of safety, connection to community, and demographics. The neighborhood survey provides insight on the Reimagining the Civic Commons signals of public life, stewardship and advocacy, trust, reputation, bridging social capital, access to nature, walkability/bikeability, and safety.

[Download the toolkit](#)

Observation Map

This tool allows you to collect data about who's visiting your site throughout the day, simply by observing. The data you collect will help you understand how many people are visiting your site and when, what types of activities they're engaging in, whether they're interacting with others around them, and more. It also collects demographic data such as age and race. The observation map provides insight on the Reimagining the Civic Commons signals of public life, mixing on site, and safety.

[Download the toolkit](#)

Site Intercept Survey

This brief survey provides a snapshot of who is visiting the site, where they're coming from, and how the site impacts visitors. It helps you understand what people think about the site and what role it plays in the surrounding neighborhood and the entire city. It also allows you to collect demographic data of a representative sample of visitors. The intercept survey provides insight on a number of Reimagining the Civic Commons signals related to the goals of civic engagement and socioeconomic mixing.

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Local News Sentiment Analysis

This tool provides a framework for analyzing public perceptions of sites and neighborhoods through the lens of your city's local news media throughout the course of a year. The data you collect will help you understand how frequently your site and neighborhood are discussed in your city's general circulation papers, and whether the sentiment of each story's narrative is positive or negative. It also allows you to visualize how perception and frequency of media coverage change over time. The local news sentiment analysis provides insight on the Reimagining the Civic Commons signal of public perceptions of sites and of the neighborhood.

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Tree Benefits Analysis Tool

This tool is designed to help you understand the ecological impact of your site's existing tree canopy and the current and projected ecological impacts of additional tree plantings. The tool is designed to work in conjunction with the i-Tree software suite, a free peer-reviewed tool from the USDA Forest Service that allows communities to quantify the benefits and value of trees. The Tree Benefits Analysis Tool provides insight on the Reimagining the Civic Commons signals of tree canopy, tree count, carbon dioxide sequestered annually, and stormwater management.

[Download the toolkit](#)

This toolkit was created by the Civic Commons Learning Network in partnership with Interface Studio, LLC.

Reimagining the Civic Commons is a national initiative to foster engagement, equity, environmental sustainability and economic development in our cities. By revitalizing and connecting public places such as parks, plazas, trails and libraries—and transforming what we expect from them and how we manage them—Reimagining the Civic Commons aims to demonstrate how strategic investments in our civic assets can connect people of all backgrounds, cultivate trust and create more resilient communities.

Learn more at civiccommons.us.